

Re: FAVORABLE position on SB 514: State Highways - Sidewalks and Bicycle Pathways - Maintenance and Repair

Melissa Schweisfuth
Hyattsville, MD 20782 (District 22)

February 21, 2024

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members,

Thank you for your service to our state.

I am writing to ask that you provide a favorable report for SB 514, which would repeal the requirement that a political subdivision maintain and repair sidewalks and bicycle pathways constructed, in accordance with Maryland statutes, along Maryland state highways.

I regularly bike for commuting and errands, live on a state road that is a key connector between residential areas and a trail system heavily used by bike commuters, and regularly drive on state roads that bisect residential, school, commercial, and transit-center areas such as MD 450 and MD 202. I am keenly aware of the lack of sufficient bike and pedestrian facilities along state roads that are highly desirable for cyclists and pedestrians, but also highly deadly due to insufficient bike and pedestrian facilities.

SB514 is very straight-forward, simply striking two provisions from State Code's Transportation Article that require local jurisdictions to maintain and repair sidewalks and bike paths along state roads if the local jurisdiction requested the sidewalk or bike path, or SHA required a developer to build a sidewalk or bike path.

SB514 is necessary because current Transportation Article provisions effectively give local jurisdiction veto power over state sidewalk and bikeway construction along state roads.

- Transportation Article § 8-629(a)(1), states that the state Administration may construct a sidewalk only "With the concurrence of the local government."
- § 8-630(b)(1)(ii), says Sidewalks shall be constructed unless "the local government indicates that there is no need for sidewalks"

By assigning maintenance and repair responsibility to a local government—even though the road is a state road—current Transportation Article provisions motivate local jurisdictions to veto proposed sidewalk and bike paths, and are thus an impediment to sidewalk and bike path construction. As such, the e Transportation Article's local maintenance by default provisions are contrary to Maryland's Vision Zero safe-roadways commitments and the State Highway Administration's Complete Streets policy. Current provisions also create inefficiencies and gaps by carving up maintenance and repair requirements across multiple entities where roads cross jurisdictions, and make it difficult for road users to know whom to contact to address issues.

SB 514 would enable local jurisdictions and SHA to assign responsibility on a case-by-case basis, based on what is most efficient and feasible for all parties involved. It will not impose a new tax or fee on residents and businesses, assign responsibility to SHA by default, disrupt SHA's existing agreements with local governments, or affect SHA's ability to negotiate similar agreements going forward.

In my own county, the local maintenance requirement has been an impediment to the the Greenbelt East Trail on MD 193, the Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis Trail extension on MD 703, and the Rhode Island Avenue Trolley Trail extension along US 1 from Hyattsville to the Washington DC border. These trails and other bike and pedestrian infrastructure are urgently needed along state roads in my county as Prince George's County has the highest rate of traffic fatalities in the state. It had 129 road deaths in 2023, including 39 pedestrian and three bicyclist deaths. Moreover, the need statewide is great as 155 pedestrians and 15 bicyclists were killed on Maryland roads in 2023.

SB 514 is s critical tool in helping Maryland reverse the trend of increasing road deaths and reaching its Vision Zero commitment – eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries on Maryland roadways by 2030.

Please provide a Favorable SB 514 committee report and support passage in the House.

Thank you for considering my comments

Melissa Schweisguth

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa A. Schweisguth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "M".A vertical stamp or mark consisting of a series of small, stacked rectangular shapes, possibly a barcode or a tracking mark.